

Newport may back Claremont on county flap

By AARON ALDRIDGE
Staff Writer

The Newport Board of Selectmen decided to table a motion that would have supported a decision by the Claremont City Council to have the city solicitor investigate the Sullivan County Delegation.

Newport "I think we need to have a serious look into this," selectman Gary Nichols said Monday night.

Councilman Jeff Goff requested by formal motion during the July 9 meeting that the city solicitor commence a discovery

process in conjunction with the state attorney general to investigate the legality of caucuses held by county Democrats. The motion passed unanimously.

Goff was invited to the board meeting by chair Virginia Irwin to discuss the status of the investigation. "I know the investigation has commenced," Goff said. "The attorney general has received our request and has inquired about the caucus and others."

During a recess at the county convention June 30, the 11 Democrats on the 13-member delegation held a "caucus" in the hallway which was followed by a vote to reject a proposed county budget.

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John Goff

Newport councilman

The "caucus" was what motivated Goff to request an independent investigation.

"There seems to be a power struggle on who has the power in the county," Goff said. "In the middle of this struggle is the

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taxpayer. So many games are being played with the budget."

Board member Jeff Kessler said he agrees with the council that there needs to be an investigation.

"I feel it would be appropriate for us to

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concur with the City of Claremont," Kessler said.

Nichols suggested that the move by the delegation to fail to pass a budget was planned so the delegation would not have to vote on a budget that would probably produce another deficit.

As of July 1, the county has been operating without a budget. If a budget is not passed by the delegation before Aug. 30, the commissioner's budget is adopted by default.

"That way the delegation can say they didn't vote for the budget," Nichols said.

The county had a \$2.5 mil-

lion deficit for fiscal 2006-2007 and has a projected deficit of \$500,000 for fiscal 2007-2008 which ended June 30.

Blame for the county budget turmoil was focused on delegation chair Peter Franklin, D-Newport.

"The City of Claremont took a risky and bold step," Goff said. "Chair Peter Franklin has become a cancer to the county."

Irwin echoed Goff's remarks and said she has many concerns about the county government.

"I'm very disappointed with Mr. Franklin and the delegation in general," Irwin said.

A motion to endorse the move by the city council was tabled until the next meeting because two members of the board were absent.

The county delegation is scheduled to meet at 1 p.m., July 30 in Newport to continue budget discussions. In addition, two meetings have been scheduled to discuss the \$7.2 million jail project at 7 p.m. July 31 in Unity and at 4 p.m. Aug. 12 in Newport.

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